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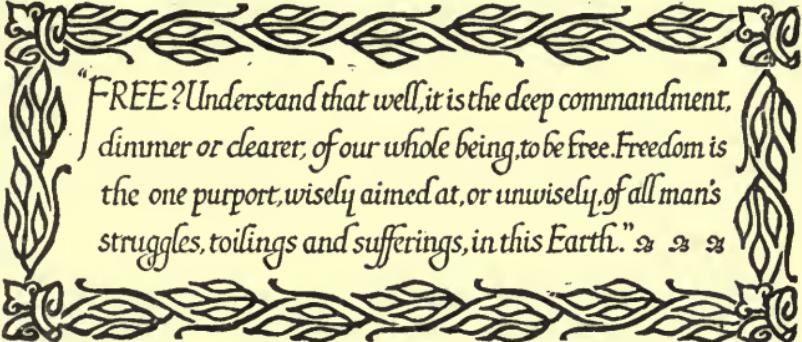
FREEDOM

FREEDOM

By
A. Martin Freeman



Published by B.T. Batsford. London

FREE? Understand that well, it is the deep commandment, dimmer or clearer, of our whole being, to be free. Freedom is the one purport, wisely aimed at, or unwisely, of all man's struggles, toilings and sufferings, in this Earth." ☙ ☙ ☙

I

FREEDOM means the opportunity to attempt what one desires, the right of expressing any thought and performing any action, and of abstaining therefrom. It implies the absence of any power in the State to make a man act otherwise than as he thinks best, and of any hindrance put in his way by other individuals. That would be a state of perfect freedom, in which no person or group ever coerced, or attempted or wished to coerce any other. Even a deliberate expression of disapproval would constitute an infringement of the law of freedom, just as in the law of coercion a

threatening attitude has been construed as a technical assault.

¶ It was once the fashionable belief that this full and ideal freedom was possessed by man in the golden days before he became corrupted. It was held that in his original state he was solitary and self-sufficing, unfettered by law or custom, oppressed by no earthly power or spiritual fears, contaminated by no sin ; and that his actual condition, fallen immeasurably away from the early felicity, was first made possible by the rudiments of art and artifice, engendered by the first groupings into society, and constantly brought to a worse pitch by the progressive complications of civilization. Freedom is, according to this view, man's birthright, though by the viciousness of latter-day society he is robbed of it at birth.

¶ In our time the exact opposite of these statements is accepted as truth, or an approximation to truth. Primitive man, so far as we can know anything about him, seems to

be the least free of mortals. His government, that is to say, the relation of the chief to the tribe, may vary considerably. The chief may be a divinity, a slave-owner, an autocratic ruler, or merely a military leader. But whatever may be the amount of relative freedom, however closely the status of the governor may approach that of the governed, the savage is the slave of a tribal custom so rigid that the sternest system of law in an advanced community allows more personal freedom. Barbarism, in short, stands for coercion and restriction, bodily, mental and spiritual.

With the historical belief in the existence of perfect freedom in early times we have also discarded the belief in the possibility of such a state. Moreover we have ceased to look upon it as the ideal. We no longer regard the baboon and the gibbon with emotions of filial piety ; we do not see, in their athletic independence and spiritual *sans géné*, elements of human perfection. However

great may be our dissatisfaction with the society of the present, we still believe that the way of man's destiny lies through civilization, and that he can attain more in dependence upon his fellows than in isolated savagery, however hygienic. Hence our teachers and prophets who have proclaimed the deepest and most positive faith in freedom have been careful, each in his own way, to introduce an important modification into their definition. From the civic point of view it is said that none should suffer restraint except when his actions infringe the liberties of others: the religious teacher includes this in his larger command, that each should live for all and not for himself.

¶ Freedom thus limited is social freedom. To this we now look forward, having ceased to look back upon a fantastical lost paradise. For if it be proved that man is not, nor ever has been born free, we are but driven back on the more consoling postulate, that he is destined to freedom. Otherwise, what is the

meaning of the constant effort, recorded through the world's annals, and manifesting itself in one mode or another in the life of every individual we know, to break trammels, to conquer resistance, to exist more intensely? Is this universal motive-power a tendency opposed to Nature's own ends, and therefore to be resisted by the wise? If so, the world is in a bad state; for not until humanity has been overpowered and mutilated will it cease to exert itself in this direction, of freedom.

¶ It would appear, too, that writers and politicians, even those most inimical to the extension of liberty, have tacitly acknowledged that mankind naturally demands it as a right. To meet the demand and, by providing an apparent satisfaction, to avoid yielding to it effectively, they have published numerous false descriptions of freedom, ingenious sophisms about its conditions, and specious assertions that it already exists. Perhaps these also show that men are secretly

ashamed of its absence. Freedom has been defined as the power to do what one ought, the power to do what is good for the race, and as adaptability to environment. Men have been told that it consists in the right to vote, the right to meet, the right to dissent, the right to have representative government. At the time when Liberty was shouted loudest it was grotesquely associated with the coward's cry of Equality and the sentimental nonsense of Fraternity. But what of the patriots who, instead of struggling for the freedom of their country, proclaimed that this had been accomplished ? To hear Pericles on the Athenian State you would think that he, from experience, knew freedom as none before and few since his day were able even theoretically to understand it : "There is no exclusiveness in our public life ; and in our private intercourse we are not suspicious of one another, nor angry with our neighbour if he does what he likes : we do not put on sour looks at him which, though

harmless, are not pleasant." The people of whom this can be truly said has indeed solved most problems. It was almost entirely untrue of the Athenians ; for they fined Æschylus and condemned Socrates, they degraded and banished their discarded favourites, they punished with death the proposal to alter certain parts of their constitution, while their greatest orators made use, in important political and legal debates, of scandalous personal abuse, and openly appealed to the lowest prejudices of their hearers. But the narrowness of Pericles' conception lies not mainly in the undue complacency of his words, but in the fact that, were they literally true, they applied exclusively to a small class at the top of a society whose foundations were laid in slavery. They amount to about as much as if an eminent and magnificent person of our own time—an ambassador, or say the King himself—were to boast that the remaining members of our old aristocracy are not in the habit of colloquially reproaching each

other,

other, in the House of Lords, with the illegitimacy so noticeable in many family trees. Few Greeks (presumably) at the time these words were spoken would have dreamed of applying them to any but the privileged few. We can now think of them, if they should contain any valuable truth, as being applicable to all. We do not consider that State threatened with the perils of extreme democracy, in which the middle classes have a vote. Moreover we have so far abolished slavery that its name can only be used metaphorically in describing our social conditions. There is then, if we are content to measure ourselves by an outworn standard, some historical justification for calling ours a "free country." Something has been accomplished in two thousand years; and if that something is great in proportion to the time spent in bringing it about, and if it is not accompanied by evils comparable to those of the past, let us by all means exult. But if, as is too well known to need demonstra-

tion, there have arisen in modern civilizations conditions of oppression unknown to the ancients, and seemingly as hard to break through as the ancient bondage, we shall be better employed in trying to discover, in our present society, elements capable of development into a fuller freedom in the future. What is the freedom of which (though less often and less confidently than formerly) we still habitually boast? Or better still: What is the desirable freedom? and are there any indications that it is attainable?

II

THE Scholastic exhortation, to make many distinctions, may be opportunely remembered at the beginning of our study; for freedom has been not an ideal merely, but also, like Righteousness or Immorality, a great catchword, a party cry, a colour used to paint many objects held up to the public gaze for warning or emulation. Its name has been employed by humanity in so many of its

ever-changing moods that it is difficult to find a constant meaning for it. The word "free" is an element in a large number of our most ordinary phrases and compounds, in meanings so dissimilar that it would be hard to find any one underlying conception to explain all. Its appeal is direct and potent, and it is probably rare enough for any lengthy discussion to take place among people sufficiently intelligent to be capable of sustained thought, where the name of freedom does not occur either incidentally or as a cardinal point in the argument. Yet even among thoughtful people its meaning is often allowed to pass unchallenged—unphilosophically taken for granted—and a term, having different and perhaps equally vague signification for the disputants, is accepted as common ground for subsequent reasoning. This is largely because our ideas of it are prejudiced by close association with a number of other ideas—with what we think right or wrong, with what we think is for our own good, for

the good of our class, for the good of other classes, or of other people generally, with justice, with patriotism, with progress.

If we appeal to the common speech we shall find this all-important conception expressed with more or less clearness, the difference apparently arising from the different classes of people among whom the phrases became stereotyped, and their emotional states in relation to the ideas designated. There are first certain purely descriptive expressions, including a number of mechanical terms, wherein the idea "unimpeded in function, unhindered by external control," seems to stand out quite simply as the meaning. Into the composition of these forms of the language there obviously entered no bias, no passion, no prejudiced intention of naming the states and objects in question in any way save one that should describe them as adequately as possible. But besides these there are numerous others, of equally frequent occurrence, seemingly not elaborated

by experience, but struck off in the heat of conflict, coined to present debatable matters with a fixed image and superscription, expressing not the nature of the things designated, but the point of view of those who would either set them up or oppose and repress them. Such usages are logically deplorable, since they do but serve to cover up and perpetuate confusion of thought ; while argumentative people—the class of the community from whose lips they are most commonly heard—more often than not make use of them as mere means to the expression of personal approval or the reverse. They are undoubtedly serious hindrances to understanding, inasmuch as they do not mean what they seem to mean, and consequently a good deal of rather theoretical thinking is necessary, to disperse the clouds created by these words round the subjects they ought to illuminate, before any profitable reasoning can take place. Although the terms “ free education ” and “ free libraries ” are utter non-

sense as applied to the institutions so called, they probably deceive but few people : a much larger number is really misled by the term “Free Trade,” which means a state of liberty wherein the sale and distribution of many articles of commerce are totally prohibited, while the traffic in others is restricted and held in check, or privileged and protected, by powers and regulations, the enumeration of which would fill a book. Free speech and the freedom of the Press, noble institutions ! The one is enjoyed daily by a set of professional and usually cautious orators, with (on occasions when deep feeling is likely to be stirred) police reporters taking shorthand notes of their words, lest they deal too plainly with freedom ; the other by the army of editors and authors, who should at least be grateful to the authorities for having made their position so far clear that it is quite easy to escape prosecution for blasphemy, sedition, treason or indecency ; it is only the unwary of these classes who go to

prison. But perhaps the most shocking misuse of language in this particular connection is enshrined in the pair of common phrases, Free Thought and Free Love. Distinguished writers have, of course, used them in true and noble senses, but as they are generally heard, the conclusion is forced upon us that the speakers understand nothing of freedom, thought or love. Such odium have they incurred that reputable dictionaries define them respectively as "undue boldness in speculation" and "promiscuity." The term "Free Thought" is commonly used with unconscious sarcasm to describe a state of mind even less thoughtful than the average ; and a man who professes a merely negative attitude toward certain theological dogmas, or an inglorious indifference to spiritual concerns, is called a Free Thinker. And though love, like thought, is in its nature fearless and free, Free Love means at best free union, and at worst, the most affectionless form of irregularity.

¶ Thus our everyday colloquial language on the whole faithfully reflects, as might be expected, the many-sided and dimly defined significance attached to the word by the multitude of speakers. And still amidst all the wrangling and confusion which have centred round the word and the idea throughout the ages, or at any rate in modern times, there stands out one significant and curious fact. Freedom as an ideal in itself is on all hands allowed to be a good. Where is the man who does not desire it for himself? Further, where is he who would assert that it is in itself an undesirable thing? Every political party makes appeal to the electors in the sacred name; every measure is eulogized as calculated to advance the cause, and criticized as tending to obstruct it. Rival reformers, full of the bitterest mutual distrust and hatred, proclaim the Only Way to it. The policeman and the hooligan are both fighting for it. A paternal government claims to impose it. Upholders of the most rigid forms of

aristocracy or oligarchy will be anxious to show that their system would confer, on all classes and grades, the largest possible measure of it. None cry out against the thing in itself ; all complacently acknowledge that it is the object, or among the objects, to be aimed at ; all are its verbal partisans. Yet on arriving at a point beyond which he does not wish for the extension of liberty, each man is tempted to cry : This is not freedom. Licence, mob-rule, anarchy, ochlocracy, any term of abuse is good enough for the freedom we do not approve. In other words, we praise freedom, but fear and oppose its results. It is a good thing, but it leads to the abyss. Therefore we must not have too much of a good thing !

¶ This is of course humanity's rough-and-ready way of arriving at the common-sense view of a problem at once philosophical and practical. All the nonsense and confusion that have enveloped the discussion, though nourished sedulously by insincere arguments

of interested parties, spring up originally round the question of how this roughly formulated theory is to be applied. What measure of restriction is it advisable to put on the actions of members of a society? Should this restriction be exercised forcibly, by means of law and a government, or left to the persuasive influence of public opinion? If there is to be a government, what shall be its powers, and what the rights of the governed? Men, in short, have to ask each other: What do you *mean* by Freedom? And it is the answers to this question that breed strife.

¶ Rousseau's fanciful picture of primitive mankind shows a condition of unbridled liberty, it is true, but it is at the same time the negation of anything that can be called social. His vision of perfect anarchy lies many stages beyond the desideratum of philosophers and social reformers to whom anarchism has appealed as the solution of the human problem. And it is noteworthy that,

although to Rousseau himself it was something more than a vision, since to him and to his contemporaries it seemed quite certain that some such description of primitive man was historically correct, yet he did not put it forward as a system, that is to say, he did not incite humanity to return or attain to this state of perfection.

The question is relative in all systems of society so called, whether those already known to have been tried in the past or those drawn up by sociologists, reformers or utopian writers. There is no point in the graduated series of social and political types at which it is possible to say : Here is freedom, and below this it is non-existent or wrongly understood. The absolute subjection of some of the lowest savages, who seem to look upon themselves as the cattle owned by their chief, shows obversely the freedom of the autocrat ; while the State whose greatest and minutest affairs are determined by the gabbling of the enfranchised masses will impose

an ignoble tyranny on the decent and wise minority. Nor can it be expected that all who desire what they consider to be true freedom should fix upon the same scheme as being both practical and desirable. The choice will depend largely on the amount of faith a man has in human nature, on what kind of freedom he values most, spiritual, social, or political, and how far he would wish one or other to preponderate. One mind understands liberty as the perfect co-ordination of function with aptitude, and of desire with environment, and thinks only of bringing this about, being convinced that when it is secured there is no longer any place or breeding-ground for the feeling of oppression or injustice. The best-known formula for the production of this peace is that of a State, consisting of hereditary classes, from the highest or ruling down to the lowest or most subject ; wherein by dint of constant breeding within the barriers of immutable castes, it is claimed that the man whose

whole time is spent in cleaning sewers will not feel the hardness of his lot, any more than the governing aristocrat will be oppressed by his responsibilities ; since neither can imagine himself as otherwise engaged.

This theory (which by the way shows an even more startling belief in the effects of heredity than that professed by our Eugenics Society) will immediately be challenged by thinkers who see freedom in a different light, on the ground that no man and no association of men has the right permanently to depress others in station or development. "Whatever satisfaction with their lives may be felt (they will argue) by the members of your specialized classes does not palliate the radical wrongfulness of degrading and limiting human beings to such an extent. Acquiescence does but tend to perpetuate a wrong ; it cannot make it right." But as soon as the allied theorists have demolished this position they will fall into two factions on the subject of individualism. One

will maintain that a man has the right of improving his position and extending the range of his activities, of acquiring power to the utmost of his ability, and that if he does so at the expense of other people, it is their own fault ; that it cannot be helped ; that to seek to restrain him is to restrict liberty ; while the opposing party urges that a man cannot attain to great power and wealth without infringing the liberties of others, that therefore his career upwards should be stopped at that point where his actions become anti-social.

¶ Afterwards will occur the fight over “government interference” — a skirmish fought in the half-dark, where greater fields are lit by the smoky torches of passion and prejudice than by the still light of reason. When universal weariness, rather than victory and defeat, has put an end to this encounter, it will occur to some one to raise the extreme issue by questioning the necessity of government. ¶ To abolish government ? To arrive at a

state wherein every man does that which is right in his own eyes, because he sees with the eyes of the community? Or perhaps so to transform government that to our eyes it would hardly be recognizable as such. For there are many functions of government which would be left untouched, were all its coercive and repressive elements to be removed. A policeman regulating the traffic is only helping every one concerned. A department arranging for the carrying of our letters and parcels is entirely beneficial, and does, in England, already perform its business with a minimum of restriction on the public. These are typical examples of administrative work, welcome and necessary in any large community. There is but a remote connection between this and the other part of government, consisting in the power to issue a command and to enforce obedience, or punish disobedience by violence. One is an assistance to civilized life, the other demoralizing and stultifying. The free communities in

Russia, migrating in search of land to the outskirts of the national territory, have invariably enjoyed a peaceable existence under their own *administration*, their happiness and prosperity being immediately destroyed when they were overtaken by the coercive *government*.

¶ But though the possibility of the Free Life should be proved a thousand times, men seem to delight in denying it. Even those who see its beauty and its material advantages, shake their heads sorrowfully when it is mentioned. Thought seems here to lose its head, to reject previous affirmations, to boggle at proceeding to a logical conclusion. A number of preconceptions, some clear enough but others confused, withhold men from venturing to admit that our complicated machinery of coercion and repression may be a huge mistake.

¶ We are of course not speaking of the vulgar-respectable, among whom such words as Anarchist or Atheist are merely terms of

abuse. Nor are we considering that class, alas too numerous, of essentially jealous natures, who feel outraged by the suggestion that people whom they despise should be admitted to as full a share of liberty as themselves. Such as these are self-outlawed from the contemplation as well as from the exercise of freedom. Fruitful discussion can here only be maintained by those who have an adequate conception of what they are talking about. Debate, that is to say, can lead to nothing but misunderstanding and purely verbal agreement or disagreement, so long as any of the participants is thinking mainly of freedom for himself, for his class, or for the class he thinks deserving of it ; and the more this initial limitation of the issue is kept at the back of the mind, unrealized and unconfessed, the greater will be the tangle. Liberty, if it is to have any constant meaning, must mean liberty for all. Any narrower significance implies its negation for a greater or lesser portion of the community, and should

therefore be called, more honestly, by a different name. A champion of freedom who lends his support to a general coercive measure, who is exacting or given to take advantage of superior social or financial position, or who mentally limits his aspiration in favour of the deserving, the educated, the majority or whatever else, is as much a hypocrite or self-deceived as the elegant panegyrist of life in the country, whose thoughts are bounded by the hawthorn hedges in the month of May.

¶ Many people consider it merely waste of time to theorize about conditions which they feel sure can never be brought about. These appeal triumphantly to the experience of civilized humanity, tacitly identifying the past with the possible, and refuse to allow that a community founded on different postulates from our own, with different traditions and aims, might produce individuals with such changed habits and estimation of values as to evolve a new morality. Others, less dogmatic,

hang back because they fear for themselves, feeling that they are not strong enough to take their own part without the protection of the law and its hirelings. Still others, with their mind's eye on most of the people they know, their memory choked with police-court reports, their experience of practical morality gained perhaps in commerce or in government service, are brought to oppose the optimists by an awe-inspiring effort to realize what would happen if all government and control were suddenly to be removed here and now. That would produce a state of "anarchy" indeed ! The immediate result would be no doubt a scene of wilder horror than would follow on the removal of all the partitions in the Zoological Gardens. It would thus be the exact antithesis to that fairest of visions, the free community. Yet strangely enough the imagining of such a chaos of starvation and plunder, of elemental tumult, scares men prematurely from the contemplation of the best-ordered State.

¶ This very civilization, however, inimical as it is to most manifestations of freedom, has produced and continues to produce men and women with whom the free life would be possible. They are an exceedingly small number in proportion to the whole ; still it has probably fallen to the lot of every one to know at least one of them. Such a man is not necessarily more kind, more altruistic or more virtuous than his neighbours, yet so high is the value he sets upon freedom that he would gladly make the personal sacrifices needed to obtain and keep it. More often than not he holds aloof from political life, not merely because he sees the futility of politics, or because he thinks that a career devoted to them tends to the degradation rather than to the improvement of the individual, but because he regards them as the product, if not the necessity, of social conditions which he abhors. These conditions, he argues, can only be remedied by direct action, and cannot be touched by extending the franchise or juggling with

wages, so long as people can be kept in subjection and dependence by the group of actual governors who control the means of subsistence. But economic tyranny is in his eyes only one aspect of the evil thing. His moral nature receives a shock at the idea of one human being coercing another. A husband compelling his wife to have children she does not want, or a wife compelling her husband to "keep up a position" or "go into society" or to devote himself to any purpose, distasteful and hostile to his natural development, is committing the same offence as a government passing a law that every man must go to church or hoist a flag on the birthday of the monarch.

¶ Suppose such a man as one of a free community of individuals, each as unlike the other in character and aptitudes as are the individuals we know, except that all in their hearts sincerely desire and cherish that liberty to which so much lip-service is paid. Suppose him, too, to be as "pushing and ener-

getic " as the most successful tradesman, and as fond of his own way as any other frail mortal. He will be as likely (it may be said) to come into collision with a reformed society as he is now with the unregenerate State. And this is true, when two important reservations have been made, namely, that society being so much less formally constituted, and regulation reduced to a minimum, it will be more difficult to offend it accidentally ; and that its members, out of their common desire for a full and universal liberty, will be the less prone to do an anti-social act deliberately.

¶ What happens now when an individual has unwittingly done some action which in an indirect way infringes the liberties of his neighbours ? Under government as we know it, if he refuses to make immediate reparation, a fine or punishment is inflicted which, being in nine cases out of ten inadequate or excessive, either makes it worth his while to commit the offence, or leaves a dangerous

feeling of rancour and rebellion in his heart. But the free community bases its control on something he respects far more than force. "If you will not give way," it says to him, "we shall be obliged to call back the priest and the lawyer, the jailer and the policeman, with all the savage institutions we have left behind." To such an appeal he has no possibility of retort save voluntary submission, strengthening his love of freedom and training him in its exercise.

The strongest ground for the hope that some such state of things may one day be brought about is the actual presence already in our midst of men who are ripe for it. This is none the less true, though it is the less publicly apparent, because many of them are neither eloquent nor of a proselytizing disposition, nor even conscious of a mission to humanity. Their influence is still powerful, by reason of the steady example they set of peaceableness and continence. It has moreover the great advantage of suffering no set-

back from the occasional violent outbursts which cause revulsion and defection to the opposite camp. Their lives show them to be possessed of a deep-seated and comprehensive respect for freedom and to be qualified, should the opportunity or necessity arise, to take their places as members of a free community. Yet to such an extent is the dislike of freedom rooted in the minds of the majority of those who make the most noise in our civic and social life, that the men of this type are to be known as much by their restraining from certain ordinary practices as by their indulgence in others. They have little desire to accumulate possessions in excess of what they can use ; they are neither prodigal nor miserly with their money ; they do not sentimentalize over misfortune or suffering, but are especially inclined to do what they can to alleviate it if it seems the result of oppression. They do not love scandal, nor do they feel indignation at others who are more lax or self-indulgent in their pleasures

than they think right or advisable. They do not wish such people to be curbed by law—the last spring they are willing to touch.

Above all, they are not jealous. The jealous and the busybody can never attain or permit freedom, but are the authors of most of the distasteful conditions of everyday social life, and the sole utterers of splenetic and impertinent cries for the intervention of authority to “put down” practices of one sort and another. The servile or the tyrannical man—for the two are but correlatives, and one man is often both—is liable to violent explosions of wrath when reading the newspapers, and may be heard to call out now and again, “They ought not to be allowed to print such things!” Free men on the contrary avoid reading what they dislike and leave others to do the same. For toleration is the very ground of freedom. Or rather, tolerance in the spiritual sense is only felt to be a virtue by the unfree. It is the act of an individual practising, as a conscious discipline, forbearance

towards something he dislikes or disapproves, and which is generally no concern of his. His attitude shows that he has not grasped the essentials of freedom. Diversity of opinion and practice is repugnant to this "pharisee of freedom." It wounds and insults his sense of propriety. To free men on the contrary it is welcome, as being significant of emancipation from custom (that is to say, from other people's habits), and an assertion of individual development.

¶ They thus feel but little respect for an official belief, or an official code of morals prescribed by society for the individual ; though they generally refrain, either out of consideration for others or because they have no vocation for rebellion, from openly outraging any of these. Such men are philosophic by nature, and show how far the adaptation of a temperamentally free spirit to uncongenial surroundings can go. Yet their presence is not entirely unnoticed, nor their intercourse ineffectual. The more clearly their value is

¶ appreciated,

appreciated, and the more the type is multiplied, the stronger will grow the feeling that conditions are indeed unsuitable and must be altered. Should this realization become general, a number of tyrannical customs, now fully as binding on most people as Acts of Parliament, would gradually fall into desuetude, beyond the power of law to revive.

¶ Law, in a country whose rulers are more than nominally responsible to the ruled, is at any given moment an antiquated expression of public opinion. Where this is not sufficiently strong to compel attention, the law will not follow its lead ; and where the law fails to meet a common demand the people legislates for itself—positively by adopting a custom, or negatively by tacitly agreeing to ignore the obnoxious legal commandment. In this way are the ordinances of government supplemented or effectively vetoed. For if a law which everybody insists upon breaking is not repealed, that law only makes the legislators look ridiculous until both are

forgotten. Even in a country where the government has arbitrary powers, and where the code of law is stationary or admits only reactionary additions, opinion, when so widely shared as to be almost universal, is stronger than law. In Russia at the present time the crime of “reading prohibited books and talking about them” is committed openly every day, and the authorities are helpless in face of the systematic disobedience ; for it is impossible (as an official of the *gendarmerie* remarked) to exile the population of Russia to Siberia. It is equally impossible, more especially in a constitutional country, to introduce or revive customs, when the people feels that it has outgrown them.

III

¶ FORCE invites force ; and legislation, carried through by a parliamentary majority amid electoral apathy, merely shows the way for similar proceedings in the opposite interest. But united feeling is unconquerable. Not by

the bomb of the revolutionary, nor by a patriot's *coup d'état*, nor by constitutional changes for which the people has no urgent desire, can men be liberated. The sure way lies through the gradual leavening of the mass of opinion by the people who are instinctively free, till human society, grown further away from the beast and the savage, can claim and make use of more humane institutions. There is an element of truth in most great lies ; and that is not altogether a false saying, that a nation evolves the institutions it deserves ; though the articulate thought of individuals goes so far ahead of the conclusions consciously and fully adopted by the mass of the people who make up a community, and who alone can safely be allowed to originate, or at least to sanction, matters concerning the social life of the whole, that at any given moment it seems to the impatient enthusiast that institutions are much further behind the present state of public development than, in truth, they are. People, too, cannot be

expected to make good use of an instrument suddenly thrust upon them, of whose nature they are but ill-informed. Humanity needs educating to freedom as to anything else ; and if we compare man as we see him in our own country and century, with what we know of him in the best civilizations of the past, the conclusion must be accepted—sorrowfully by the sentimental, joyfully by the cynic, and calmly by the seeker after truth—that during the few thousand years accessible to history he has, in this direction, been educated very little. Yet such a proposition holds in itself no ultimate discouragement. Rather on the contrary may it strengthen the belief that efforts rightly directed, even if apparently futile, may not be quite fruitless, probably indeed are not ; since progress does take place, though portentously slowly and only along one or two wavering lines at a time, instead of symmetrically and concurrently in many directions, as its sanguine partisans would desire. The

goal still remains the goal, though its immense distance has been underestimated. No serious reformer now hopes to free humanity in our time or in our century. In fact he would be a bold optimist who should prophesy that the consummation will be reached by our civilization or by that which is destined to follow it. But as we have got rid of the *patria potestas*, and almost completely put an end to the chattel-slavery, which were fundamental elements in the classical civilizations, so it may be that the peoples who arise on our ruins will set their foot a step or two beyond our utmost tracks by abolishing one or more of those institutions, still cherished among us, which give one man unnatural power over another.

¶ But however slow be the advance, men of goodwill will not the less on that account exert what influence they can towards directing and helping it on. All that will result from an effort to realize the vast time required to produce one single change for the better,

is that they will wisely refrain from trying to force the pace too ardently in dubious circumstances, lest they should work mischief irre-mediable save by centuries of struggle. On the other hand, who can declare positively that the great change is so immeasurably distant ? that because the journey has been made at a snail's pace hitherto it will never be made more rapidly ? The satisfactory settlement seems to be far enough away : its initial conditions are not even theoretically known. Yet this may be because we are living in a dark age preceding some general illumination. Something analogous to a great physical or mathematical discovery, some new formula in political science, may bring with it the solution of the problem of distribution, and abolish the conditions which at present render freedom an unrealizable dream, or even an unimagined state, to the great mass of the community.

¶ For it is unreasonable to expect that people whose lives from childhood to old age are beset by hardship and anxiety, owing

to the difficulty of making a living, should develop as a class the attributes of freemen. Where the material basis of personal freedom does not exist, it is fantastic to seek for true notions of liberty in the political, social and spiritual spheres. It is hard for men to believe in what lies entirely beyond their experience, and our less fortunate classes must at present feel that freedom, though it apparently exists for some, is not for them ; as uncivilized men have been known to believe that they cannot mount a staircase, even though they see a European perform the feat.

¶ Or perhaps a truer analogy may be found between the present age and the period preceding the abolition of slavery. It may be that we are awaiting a moral conviction as much as or more than a scientific solution of the social problem. If it were once fully realized and intensely felt that the actual state of things is wrong, then political and economic arguments would have to go the way of the alleged reasons for retaining the American

negroes in a state of servitude, and public opinion in favour of a change would grow into an irresistible demand. More equitable distribution of the world's goods would mark a long and important stage on the upward way : and signs are not lacking at the present moment to indicate that some step in this direction must be taken within a measurable period. Then perhaps will talk of freedom become intelligible to men who now know only its negation. When a man can lay out money and improve his holding with a reasonable prospect of remaining in possession, without fear of the enriched townee coming along to buy the land and evict the worker in order to "make an estate" for himself ; when he is not obliged to wait years or leave his village before he can marry, because there is no cottage for him ; when he can walk across a common at night without being followed and challenged by the keeper ; when he no longer has to avoid useful public footpaths of a Saturday because

the Jewish gentlemen from—shall we say London ? have arrived, and are playing with firearms in such fashion that nothing within range is safe except the pigeons and rabbits which they noisily frighten ; when he is not afraid to leave his dog unchained, or to express his opinion on the affairs of the country-side and of the nation ; when he dare consult his own inclination as to church-attendance and the use he makes of what little leisure time is incidental to the agricultural life : then and then only will he be capable of understanding the rudiments of freedom. Bodily and material emancipation must precede the general spread of new and more spiritual conceptions. Generations of men born after the removal of the ancestral state of bondage will be in a position to envisage other problems in a clearer light. Not only will they perceive the wrongfulness of the unnatural power of one person over many ; not only will they realize the injustice of coercion by a partial and interested legis-

lature ; but they will, if freedom have truly entered into their souls, begin to question the sanctity of many customs and prohibitions, and the right of one or many men to take an intrusive and impertinent interest in the purely private concerns of another ; they will recognize that control, where none is needed, is bad, they will grow to feel that morality does not consist in being uncharitable and tyrannical towards one's neighbours.

¶ It is impossible to forecast the first move, however imminent it may be felt to be ; even its initial conditions are not yet understood. The forces preparing it are still undeclared. It is quite likely that it will not come from the hitherto expected quarter. Democratic and popular agitation is but one, and perhaps not the most potent among the factors which seem to be working towards a change. A more effective, because more spiritual, motive-power is arising. Gradually indeed, but noticeably, a new sense of sin, the dawn of a new morality, is emerging to our consciousness.

It is becoming the prevalent feeling, for instance, that property in land or industry should not, as it does now, involve absolute power over the lives of tenants and workers. "A man can do as he likes with his own" is no longer the potent catchword that it once was. A steadily increasing number of people now acknowledge that it is an immoral and anti-social act for one man to use his financial advantage to starve or banish or coerce another. And although there is yet no general decrease in such actions (because the class in a position to perform them is the last to be touched by all change), there is an already articulate and growing opposition to them, which may before long count for much in public opinion, the ultimate arbiter in social life.

¶ Such attempts to forecast the future can, however, have as little bearing on the problems of everyday existence as they can be proved to be true or false. Whether we entertain the most pessimistic views as to the

approach of the great deliverance, or whether we nourish a vivid hope that the present age may very soon, in this as in other respects, come to be recognized as mediæval, the field of possible activity remains the same, as do the powers and opportunities for action of each man therein. It is well that the dream should fade quickly, that we should return at once to our actual society with its conflicting types :—the man who so far respects himself and others as to feel convinced that government, in any of its accepted meanings, must one day be abolished ; the tyrannical, who desires to rule over others ; the jealous, who thinks that regulation and compulsion are good for his neighbours, and—perhaps the most discouraging species to contemplate—the servile, who welcomes a “strong” government as salutary for himself. The last three of these can claim no more of our attention, save as a framework encompassing and throwing into relief the immediate object of study —the life of the free spirit in a society which,

from its system of law, its economic conditions and the equally strong tyranny of unwritten rules, can at almost every point only be contrasted with the congenial state. In addition to what has already been said on this subject, we may touch on one further point of practical interest, namely : What should be the attitude of the freeman towards law and authority ?

To this question the stiff-necked individualist returns at once the most obvious answer : Reject all authority ; pay to the law only that minimum of attention necessary to keeping out of its way ; refuse to have anything to do with legislation as with something essentially hateful ; do no act and speak no word that may to the slightest extent seem to countenance the existing state of things. This is counsel of perfection for the man who wishes merely to ignore what he dislikes and to order his own life so as to attain the possible maximum of personal freedom : it is an excellent anarchistic

recipe for saving one's soul. The question is of course largely one of temperament, and this may be the only way of escape for certain stern and barren natures. But when all allowance has been made for the force of their example, it still remains open to doubt whether this be the best method of furthering the cause of freedom for all. An apparently unintelligible creed, a practice seemingly founded on far-away theory, can provoke nothing but astonishment, usually followed by active dislike, on the part of people who know nothing of the mental processes which are their foundation, but find them suddenly presented in academic completeness of exterior. Men are only readily influenced by what can be shown distinctly to affect their immediate affairs, and what does not cost too great an effort to understand. To tell people to take no interest or part in legislation, but to resist compactly any law they dislike, is to give them advice which strikes them at once as dangerous and absurd. To uproot

traditions, to change the accepted meaning of history, to give a new significance to the successive changes in the system of representative government, to make clear the distinction between power and the electoral franchise—all these things are necessary and good. But if you wish to instruct a man whose chief concern must be with the problem of earning his living, it is not of much use to present him with the “Encyclopædia Britannica,” even if you build him a little chamber to keep it in. Nor is it much good merely to tell him that everything that he has yet learned is wrong. Yet the unyielding theorist inevitably impresses those who imperfectly understand him as behaving in one or the other of these fashions. Freedom transcends party politics ; its purpose is served incidentally by all parties, and combated systematically by all ; its adherents can then give their allegiance to none. But its appeal must be made to those who still think they have travelled the whole distance of political thought when

they have declared themselves Liberal, Tory or Socialist. It must speak "in terms." By asserting that constitutional liberty does not exist, that under governments there is only lesser or more complete slavery, and that all are equally criminal, that freedom means lack of restraint, and therefore one should so alter his whole life as to get rid of restraint, you are most likely to move your hearer to anger, amusement or pity, according to his temperament. If on the other hand you come down from your pedestal and concede what he grasps intuitively, that humanity lives and has lived in relative states of greater or less freedom, it is then comparatively easy to discuss tendencies and proposals as likely to advance or impede its general extension. We live and shall for a long time continue to live under government, and shall have to put up with "government interference." To turn our backs to the world and deny the fact in splendid isolation does not seem a very helpful plan. More practical utility will surely

result if we adopt the contrary attitude, of watchfulness towards legislation, and admit that, for the society in which our lot is cast, it may take more or less desirable forms. For the present, that is to say, it must be accounted as definitely bad when it restricts liberty, and as definitely good when it extends it. Thus one who is interested in no political party, but only in the ultimate deliverance of humanity, should welcome any measure opening up possibilities in that direction, without reference to its origin, and with no fear of the bogey lurking behind the cries of Reaction, Interference, Oppression, as they are used in party warfare. He will attempt to make use of government to the mitigation of the evils resultant from it, and eventually to its own transformation or undoing.

¶ Many generations must pass before ideas of freedom have permeated society. Till that time approaches, till a morally evolved community can undertake a life unembarrassed by the old terrors and inhibitions, we shall

either have to submit to a purely external government, or to plunge again into chaos, or to use government in the meanwhile as far as possible for our own purpose, and so prepare for the weakening of its control and the transformation of its nature and function. While the historic, and alas the younger parties as well, continue to pile up legislation "for the good" of other people against their will, the champion of freedom can but criticize and attempt to influence it from his clear point of view. Realizing the necessity, now and always, of some restriction, he will yet do his best to reduce it constantly till it reach its minimum.

IV

¶ FOR restriction of one sort and another is not merely socially inevitable ; it is inherent in humanity. Unconditioned freedom can neither be desired nor attained, nor even fully imagined. For its realization, the sweeping away of coercive restraint from authority is

but the first step. In its wake must follow the baffling limitations of weakness and fear, the moderating influences of personal habit and social custom, the unsatisfying results of passion, the trammels of superstition, all the deterring effects of ideas of right and wrong together with their offspring, uneasiness of conscience and remorse. Omnipotence is only free in so far as it knows no pity and is beyond all ethical bounds. Absolute freedom is thus one with absolute being, the negation of all modes of being. It is nevertheless "freedom in itself," the only freedom, the type, the ideal ; and it would be a mistake to dismiss summarily the attempt to apprehend or express in words such an unrealizable condition, as useless or even as unpractical. For if the ideal were attainable it would cease to be ideal ; and a vision of perfection is the only ultimate guide amid perplexing conditions. The exact measure of the attainable in any given direction is always an unknown quantity : it is unascertainable by the way,

and lies ever this side of the goal. It will vary in the estimation of each individual, and can serve but ill as a general criterion. If we were only to attempt to see a few steps beyond what has already been reached we should be without knowledge of the objective of the various lines of progression. But by looking constantly in the direction of what is perfect we are better enabled to make a reasonable choice among the paths suggested, to calculate the chances of their turning out to be sure roads or dangerous short-cuts, byways or blind alleys. Only by this means shall we obtain a view sufficiently clear to warn us against the unconsidered acceptance of some measure of reform, some proposed alteration in our scheme of life, which promises an immediate extension of what is desired, though it may entail equally important limitations and negations of the same thing in other directions.

¶ Contemplation of the ideal will in our special case serve to remind men of a fact which can hardly be too often repeated,

namely, that political and economic liberty, though they are the roots, are yet not the flower of freedom. However desirable it may be that the actions of the individual should be hampered as little as possible by law, or even by custom, there is yet an emancipation as true and effective as can be either granted or withheld by any government or authority. Mental and moral freedom, far from being the most fantastic attributes of the Absolute, are precisely the lines along which every man may cast and sail a course unhindered, to the very limits of his personality. So long as he does not violate the first law of the free religion by attempting to make others follow him, he may seek his own peace by all the methods whereof his nature is capable. He may experiment, change his mind, mingle or employ alternatively different systems. He may even be a psychological anarchist, and banish so far as he is able all system from his spiritual development. The aim may be religious and mystical, it may be utilitarian or hedonistic

or speculative : in any case no man can debar another from pursuing it. This should be the least adulterated form of freedom attainable by Humanity ; and its peculiar attribute is, that each one who claims it achieves it in proportion to the strength of his desire : his efforts bring about all the success he is capable of enjoying.

¶ There are many ways leading to the retirement from the world of fact and chance to a world made suitable by selection or creation. From the rejection of the burden of thought as set forth in the “ Rubáiyát ” to the triumphant contemplation of a Buddha, there are paths to suit all travellers ; though the former reaches but to the outskirts of the kingdom and has not all of its qualities. The man who should escape from the hardness of life by devoting his time to drinking, or to something as easy but less tiring, must depend on material circumstances to be in a position to do so. The proper realm of the spirit may be entered by many who have but

narrow quarters and poor surroundings in the world. Hither they come to find the truth hidden by the world's lie, the freedom denied by its restraint, the development crushed by its discouragement. And as has been said, each one here attains, not the varying objects of his impatient cry, "I want ! I want !" but the end of his steady desire. At a little distance from the bibulous renouncer of life, and still outside the city, is the seeker after vague consolations, too weakly for freedom. External life does not satisfy him ; he feels that there is something better to be had, but does not see the way to it because he does not know where or what it is. He reads a few mystical or philosophical books and tries to extract therefrom a regimen ; but as he only half understands his reading and half determines on his direction he wanders lost and dispirited. He talks to people who, he thinks, have found the way, and makes sudden attempts to adopt their practice, never reflecting that spiritual emancipation must be won,

and cannot be adopted by imitation or conferred from without. By this step he is again led astray ; for the instrument he has borrowed was created by another personality and shaped for its special needs. His own personality is the problem he has never tackled. Whether from inertia or impatience or lack of confidence he has held aloof from the central study. He has found it easier to read than to think, to be receptive than to produce, to follow than to explore. His mental lumber-room is strewn with scraps of mysticism and psychology, with monstrous notions of diet and hygiene, with fragmentary disciplines and ideals in the rough. His one chance of happiness is to return humbly to the interests of everyday life, and abandon the attempt to cultivate a self which is too flimsy to be caught and too inconstant to be educated. If he persists, he will wander for ever, a standing illustration of the adage : The promised land is there, where one is not.

More likely to arrive is the nature which, though it may have little to put in the place of what it gives up, yet renounces sternly and consistently. Many motives lead to this rule of life, independent of the once commonly accepted doctrine that pleasures could be as it were invested instead of spent, and every joy renounced in this world became a contribution towards an annuity of bliss in the next. Such a notion, in spite of its vitality, tremendous in the past and not yet extinct, and of its historic influence both for good and evil, is rapidly becoming less popular with the growth of the realization that conditions of human life can and must be made happier. When men's conceptions of society were static rather than progressive, when the ills of life were thought to be humanly unalterable and divinely ordained, and when so many kinds of pleasure were looked upon as in themselves wrong, it was natural enough that the man who avoided pleasure, rather than he who pursued after it, was considered

to be doing the best for himself. But the modern ascetic is usually actuated by some more immediate motive. His object, even if it be holiness pure and simple, is something towards which he can feel himself progressing ; he wishes to escape from certain aspects of life intrinsically distasteful or disturbing ; or he wishes to arrange his existence with a greater simplicity than a promiscuous participation in life's opportunities will allow, in order to give time for the development of chosen faculties. Perhaps he distrusts his capacity for pleasure ; perhaps he yearns for it, yet fears still more the disappointment of missing it ; he may find that it entails suffering of mind or body as a result ; he may love it too ardently and feel his mind unbalanced by it in anticipation or retrospect. Whatever his experience may be in detail, he has concluded that he cannot allow himself pleasure without submitting to it as to a tyranny, and so takes the straight way of escape by repressing and limiting his desires

and needs until he is out of reach of disappointment or failure.

¶ More commonly to be found than the modern ascetic is the less vital though more specious type of the latter-day puritan. His profession is enjoyment and activity ; he poses almost as a reckless hedonist ; his talk is of developing the faculties, getting all there is to be had from existence, multiplying experience and sensations, in short, individual expansion. Yet his whole life is governed by a profound mistrust and an excessive caution. He shows much the same indulgence to his own nature as was accorded by Mr. Cramp-ton to his little daughter, to whom he was “ always kind, and only told her to sit still and not to speak.” He dare not enjoy anything simply and whole-heartedly ; he noisily welcomes each banquet, but leaves the table before he is satisfied ; he practises needless economies so as not to fall into the habit of spending ; he would even avoid loving over-much, lest too much suffering should result

from the loss of the loved object; he shrinks from effort and exertion through dread of fatigue. He talks in hogsheads and drinks in ounces (measured in the chemist's bottle). Fear of excess in any direction dominates and subdues him. Yet such is his fashion of seeking deliverance from a too strong attraction : he attains to a universal moderation and half-nourished state, wherefrom he doubtless extracts some measure of passive and slimy joy. Still, he does not entirely renounce, and he has partially delivered himself from the tyranny of circumstance.

¶ His more gifted and courageous relative is the man who seeks not to repress but to realize himself, who is strong enough to support both joy and sorrow, who approaches life with the genuine intention of testing, exploring, trying his strength, discovering a meaning in existence, and further, of moulding it as far as possible to human purpose. He makes long strides towards freedom by discarding the two great fears, of self and of

circumstance : for the one he has harnessed and put to his own uses, the other is his ally : he it is who dares to be himself. He knows that if fate is inexorable it is not to be conciliated by pusillanimity ; the thought of possible loss does but strengthen his love. He does not fear overwork or excess of joy ; he will strain his faculties in order to make sure of getting the full use of them. Selection is to him a matter of no difficulty, for he does not accept other people's valuations and will not trouble himself with anything that does not serve his own purpose. Here belong the student, the artist, the mystic. None of them have renounced life, none have escaped from its problems and burdens. But theirs are the moments and hours of absorption, of contemplative existence on other planes than where their bodies are, when trammels do not exist, when circumstance is left behind, when thought follows and leads itself, and the individual soul, disengaged from the meaningless and turbulent succession of trivial events,

experiences a joy, inalienable and not measured in time. For freedom, in spite of all epigrams to the contrary, does consist in doing what you like ; and that is why when we look out into the world we find that it only exists in momentary snatches for most people, though more extensively for some ; but for the same reason it is discernible by those capable of another life and gifted with another vision, from foreground to horizon.



*Printed at The Ballantyne Press
London 1913*

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